Report Summary
Primary Progress, Secondary Challenge:
A State-by-State Look at Student Achievement Patterns[1]

Introduction

The report characterizes the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001as "a national commitment to raising academic achievement for all students and closing the gaps that separate low-income students and students of color from their peers." To assess the extent to which states have met that commitment, the report analyzed reading and mathematics assessment results – both on state tests and on the National Assessment for Education Progress (NAEP) – from 2003 to 2005 at each of three levels. There were 32 states participating in the analysis at the elementary school level; 31 states participating at the middle, school level; and 25 states participating at the high school level.

The body of this 24-page report is only six pages long. It is followed by 10 pages of tables that report majority-minority income-based performance gaps, a one-page appendix on methodology, a one-page appendix listing the states that did not participate at each level (and why), a five-page appendix that compares state and NAEP results for 2005, and one page of endnotes.

The summary that follows is limited to mathematics and to the discrepancy between performances on the state tests and on the NAEP. In particular, it summarizes data from tables in two appendices.

Mathematics Performance Discrepancies in 2005:
State Test Performances Versus NAEP Performances

Grade 4

Appendix C-2 (page 21) reports, for each of the 50 states, the percent of grade 4 students performing at the Proficient or Advanced levels on the 2005 NAEP. For each of 45 states, it also reports the percent of students performing at the Proficient level or above on the state's elementary mathematics test.[2]

There were only three states in which the NAEP performance percentage was higher than the state performance percentage: Hawaii (1 percent); Massachusetts (9 percent); and Wyoming (4 percent).

For the remaining 42 states, the discrepancies in the two percentages, with the state percentages being equal to or greater than the NAEP percentages, ranged from 0 percent (Maine) to 60 percent (Colorado and Mississippi). The grade 4 performance discrepancy gaps were grouped as follows.

- 0 to 10 percent: 2 states (ME, SC)
- 11 to 20 percent: 7 states (AR, KY, MO, MT, NM, RI, WA)
- 21 to 30 percent: 5 states (CA, FL, NV, OH, PA)
- 31 to 40 percent: 10 states (AK, CT, IN, KS, LA, MD, MI, MN, NJ, WI)
- 41 to 50 percent: 14 states (AZ, DE, GA, ID, IL, IA, NE, NY, OK, OR, SD, TX, VA, WV)
- 51 to 60 percent: 4 states (AL, CO, MS, NC)

Grade 8

Appendix C-4 (page 23) reports, for each of the 50 states, the percent of grade 8 students performing at the Proficient or Advanced levels on the 2005 NAEP. For each of 44 states, it also reports the percent of students performing at the Proficient level or above on the state's elementary mathematics test.[3]

There were only four states in which the NAEP performance percentage was higher than the state performance percentage: Maine (1 percent); Massachusetts (4 percent); Missouri (10 percent); and South Carolina (7 percent).

For the remaining 40 states, the discrepancies in the two percentages, with the state percentages being higher than the NAEP percentages, ranged from 2 percent (Hawaii) to 62 percent (North Carolina). The grade 8 performance discrepancy gaps were grouped as follows.

- 0 to 10 percent: 3 states (HI, NM, WY)
- 11 to 20 percent: 4 states (AR, CA, KY, WA)
- 21 to 30 percent: 10 states (DE, Il, MD, MT, NJ, NV, NY, OH, OR, TX)
- 31 to 40 percent: 13 states (AK, AZ, FL, ID, KS, LA, MI, MN, MS, NE, PA, SD, WV)
- 41 to 50 percent: 8 states (AL, CO, CT, GA, IN, IA, OK, VA)
- 51 to 60 percent: 1 state (WV)
- Above 60 percent: 1 state (NC)

Comments from an Associated Press Article

While the discrepancies between the proficiency percentages on state exams and on the NAEP were not noted in The Education Trust report, those differences did draw the attention of the media.[4] The following comments are excerpted from an AP article. References to "the national test" are to the NAEP.

> States define what "proficient" means, and their expectations for students, tests, and passing scores vary widely. States have a huge stake in the scores on their own exams, because they determine whether schools make enough progress to avoid federal penalties. The federal test is supposed to be a benchmark. But some state officials say the federal standard of proficiency -- competency over challenging subject matter -- is too high.
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> "It makes you question whether the definition of 'proficiency' anyplace is anchored in real-world demands," said Michael Cohen, president of Achieve, a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping states raise academic standards. The new data will provide even more urgency, Cohen said, to states that are working to bring their standards up to what colleges and employers want.
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> One factor is unlikely to change. The state tests have consequences for schools. The federal test does not. So even big shortfalls on the federal test may not force much action.
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> "We specifically pushed for all 50 states to participate in (the national test) to shed some light on state assessments," said Education Department spokeswoman Susan Aspey. "We hope states take a good, hard look at this data and use it to help the millions of kids who aren't yet at grade level."

About the Publisher

The Education Trust was established in 1990 by the American Association for Higher Education as a special project to encourage colleges and universities to support K-12 reform efforts. Now an independent nonprofit organization, its mission is to realize the high academic achievement of all students at all levels, pre-kindergarten through college, and forever close the achievement gaps that separate low-income students and students of color from other youth. The headquarters of the Education Trust are at 1250 H Street, NW, Suite 700, Washington, DC 20005. TEL: 202-293-1217. http://www.edtrust.org

Caveat Emptor

This summary was prepared by Bob Kansky (robk@tribcsp.com). It's one of a series summaries offered to business, education, and policy leaders who are interested in the systemic improvement of mathematics and science education. The summary does not critique the report's assumptions, methods, or conclusions. It simply uses a somewhat standardized format to provide a brief introduction to the content of the report. This particular summary includes some phrases taken directly from the report without specific attribution (but with care not to misrepresent the intent the report). Readers are encouraged to consult the original document for further information

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[1] Hall, D. & Kennedy, S. (2006). *Primary progress, secondary challenge: A state-by-state look at student achievement patterns.* Washington, DC: The Education Trust. 24 pages. Downloaded from http://www.edtrust.org on March 3, 2006.

[2] State performance data on elementary mathematics was not available for New Hampshire, North Dakota, Tennessee, Utah, and Vermont.

[3] State performance data on middle school mathematics was not available for New Hampshire, North Dakota, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Utah, and Vermont.

[4] Feller, B. "Gaps appear state, federal test scores." (March 3, 2006). *Boston Globe.* Page A14.